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OCA 3996-88

15 December 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, Office of Congressional Affairs

FROM: [ ] Office of Training and Education

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SUBJECT: FOA Notes on Congress

John:

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I am attaching two recent FOA notes that mention Congress. The first, by [ ] expresses criticism of some aspects of congressional relations. The second, by [ ] reports on Rep. McCurdy's expression of deep interest in analysis, at a recent Kennedy School function.

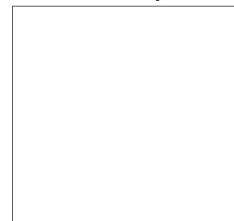
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[ ] (now Chairman of the FOA Steering Group) and I would be pleased to post on FOA any observations you may have regarding the content of either note. We would also welcome the opportunity to send you advance copies of notes that deal with Congress. We would send them to any member of your Office whose AIM USERID you provide. We then could post any OCA comment at the same time we post the note from an FOA member.

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We would also like to suggest that a member of your Office attend the case study dinner meetings that Kennedy School holds in Washington several times per year. We have had three such meetings so far. Each time, congressmen and staffers have participated in the discussions, often making judgments about the quality and utility of analysis. I personally found McCurdy's performance remarkable. He asked, in effect, how he as a chairman of HPSCI could know (1) that he was seeing all the Agency products, (2) that CIA products represented the views of Agency analysts, and (3) that CIA was paying sufficient attention to over-the-horizon issues. He said he participates in the Kennedy School functions in hopes of finding answers to such questions. As I remember, he is a member of the steering board for the CIA-Kennedy School program.

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DATE: December 14, 1988

NOTE TO: Friends of Analysis

SUBJECT:  SUPPORTING POLICY

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RE:  note dated 11/30/88  
(On policy rotations)

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I was much intrigued by your note and must say that I experienced a terriffically difficult time readjusting to the DI culture after having been in a policymaking office for 15 months. My greatest revelation was a sense of kinship for Bob Gates' frustration with the DI's isolation. I do not think we have made much progress in improving our support for policymakers and it's mostly our own fault: laziness, hubris, and lack of interest in what the concerns of the policymaker are.

I don't mean to cast stones. Before serving downtown, I thought I "knew" what the policymaker needed just by reading the traffic, the papers, etc. I believed sincerely that my knowledge also enabled me to "educate" the policymaker to issues he might not know were important. Sometimes that was the case. But more often than not, I had no idea what drove the policymaker or how quickly he needed answers. A recent FOAer commented that most NSC staff people believe they are their own best analysts. I submit that's because we are not doing our jobs properly.

Some of this failure is built into the system and the way we view our jobs. We are not a policy-making organization and there are strong values in the DI culture that argue against getting too policy prescriptive. I understand and support these values but I think they have been carried to the extreme. Sometimes we use our "US Implications" section of intelligence assessments to dance around policy prescriptions; other times our work is so removed from what the policymaker does that we don't appreciate what bare bones facts he needs to make a policy decision. It is the latter issue about which I am most concerned: our lack of attention to the policymaker's calendar, agenda, and constraints.

I lay the blame for this mostly at the feet of managers. They have primary responsibility for interacting with country-desk officers (at the branch chief level); deputy assistant secretaries (at the Division level); and assistant secretaries (at the office level) downtown. Analysts often believe they are "penalized" for spending too much time downtown, a belief either fostered by managers or mistakenly held by analysts.

Even when I was working at the State Department's Policy Planning staff, I needed to meet with counterparts in other bureaus every day or so -- certainly more than once a week. How many branch chiefs, division chiefs, or analysts do you know that see their counterparts at State once a week? I know very few who do. More often than not, offices view their attendance at weekly NEA or EAP or whatever bureau's staff meetings as a way of keeping in touch. BUT THOSE MEETINGS NEVER REVEAL

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THE REAL POLICY ISSUES AT STAKE: THEY ARE CABLE GISTING SESSIONS. Unless they are followed by parish calls, little is learned.

Analysts are missing opportunities to market their work, too. How many analysts take the opportunity to brief their papers, typescripts, etc. to their most important consumers? This is a great way to make yourself useful and get your foot in the door. It is also especially important for any paper above the secret level, as most consumers will not be able to store the paper nearby. Having to make a special trip to read a codeword paper almost invariably means that it will not be read.

There is plenty of blame to go around. In short, too few of us get downtown often enough to sense the pulse of the policy environment.

I also believe that the DI is far too isolated from Congress to understand the policy process. The Congressional calendar and the press often are the primary drivers of the US foreign policy agenda. By Agency policy, analysts are "forbidden" from having independent contacts with Hill staffers. This is a disservice to us and to our consumers. We need to be more in tune with Congress's interests and agenda with the State and Defense Departments. Otherwise we can be put in the position of saying things that are, frankly, silly. Informal contacts with Hill staffers should be encouraged. Responsible analysts know what information can be discussed. Newspaper level information suffices for much of the time anyway. If this is really not possible -- for reasons I do not understand -- then it is imperative that the Congressional Liaison staff serve a much broader function. One possibility would be to have each office have a person detailed to Congressional Liaison to follow Congressional debate on areas of interest to the regional offices. This individual would attend DI regional offices' daily meetings and report back on developments.

I could go on and on. I think the bureaucracy needs to find ways to reward people who make that extra effort to market our product. Analysts and managers need to believe the CIA appreciates the good sense and security consciousness of its professionals. The Agency can do this by reviewing its policies on contacts with Congressional staffers, for example, and by really evaluating managers and analysts for the consistency of their contacts downtown. I am not suggesting that a GS-8 analyst be expected to brief a DAS; obviously some analysts are more ready for exposure to policymakers than others. The key is keeping regular contact with your counterparts and sharing the information you learn. There is room for initiative at all levels. But the system needs to find ways to reward it.

I would be interested in views from other rotation returnees. One last note: I found my rotation at the State Dept.'s Policy Planning Staff an invaluable experience. I also believe that with enough dedicated analysts serving downtown, this place can change for the better. But this might not happen until generational change occurs.

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DATE: November 30, 1988

NOTE TO: Friends of Analysis

SUBJECT: Kennedy School Discussion: McCurdy

Of equal interest to me were some remarks by Congressman Dave McCurdy (D., Oklahoma), a very active member of HPSCI. McCurdy had come to the previous session in this Kennedy School series, on the fall of Marcos, and he clearly is fascinated with the question of the quality of analysis. Congress has always spent most of its time on covert action, he said, which consumes a tiny fraction of the intelligence budget. He clearly thinks analysis should get more attention than it has in the past; he spent one of the breaks in the session asking DI and INR analysts about how the analytical process really works. It seemed clear to me that he was going to go on gnawing this bone, from which I conclude that we're going to be hearing questions from Congress about process as well as about substance.

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